

# **National Fire Plan**

## **National Park Service's Rural Fire Assistance Program NPS Midwest Region 2001**

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The Department of the Interior's Rural Fire Assistance Program, or RFA, was formed under the National Fire Plan in fiscal 2001 in response to the devastating fire season of 2000. It is the equivalent to the USDA Forest Service's volunteer fire assistance program. The RFA program aims to enhance the fire protection capabilities of rural fire districts, through assistance with training, equipment purchases, and prevention activities, on a cost-share basis.

Of the 378 units of the National Park Service, at least 245 experience wildland fires. Particularly in the smaller parks, significant assistance from adjacent small communities and from rural or volunteer fire departments is needed to respond to wildland fires; in many cases, these local fire departments are the only fire fighting resources available to help the park.

Historically, the Park Service had no funding capacity to assist these small fire departments. However, fiscal 2001 appropriations for the Department of the Interior and related agencies enabled the NPS to formalize and significantly advance its Rural Fire Assistance Program, with \$1,550,000 appropriated in fiscal 2001, its pilot year.

The Rural Fire Assistance Program is primarily designed to increase firefighter safety and enhance the fire protection capacities of rural fire departments. This is achieved by assisting those departments in meeting or exceeding accepted standards of wildland fire qualifications, training, and performance. The Park Service places emphasis on departments that protect rural communities and play a substantial role in the protection of federal lands.

The Park Service's Midwest Region consists of 13 states and 55 National Parks, 35 of which have an active fire program. Through the National Fire Plan-funded Rural Fire Program, 30 of those parks assisted adjacent rural and volunteer fire departments through training and wildland firefighting equipment purchases.

The RFA program requires coordination among state, local, rural, tribal, and federal firefighting agencies. In order to qualify for assistance, the rural fire department must serve a population of 10,000 people or less in the wildland urban interface. Communities must also pay for 10 percent of the costs. Through the RFA program, these small departments are now able to respond to wildland fires and assist their local National Parks and Monuments.

Rural fire departments receive training in wildland firefighting through courses such as S-130 (Basic Firefighting) and S-190 (Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior). In addition to training, the program also distributes grants for equipment and gifts-in-kind. In the Park Service's Midwest Region, \$267,000 was allocated for distribution to rural and volunteer fire departments in fiscal 2001.

In fiscal 2001, eighty-six rural and volunteer fire departments benefited from the program, with 30 National Park Service sites in the Midwest Region working cooperatively with them. Better equipping and training the fire departments to respond to wildland fires and wildland urban interface issues benefits everyone involved.

### **Wind Cave National Park and the Custer and Fall River county areas**

Wind Cave National Park in Hot Springs, S.D. is providing support to the volunteer fire departments of Custer, Pringle, Buffalo Gap, Cascade, Custer Highlands, Minnekhata, and Argyle in the form of wildland firefighting equipment to help combat wildland fires in the Custer and Fall River county areas of South Dakota. The NPS has also allocated funds for training and for personal protective equipment. The aforementioned fire departments are eligible for assistance because of their rural locations serving populations of less than 10,000. In addition, these departments are responsible for wildland fire suppression in and around the park.

### **Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site and Stanton Rural Fire Dept.**

Likewise, Knife River Indian Villages National Historic Site in Stanton, N.D., offered assistance, through the program, to the Stanton Rural Fire Department.

### **Keweenaw National Historic Park and Calumet and Quincy-Franklin Townships**

Keweenaw National Historic Park, in Calumet, Miss., presented wildland firefighting equipment obtained through the program to Chief Keith Jenich of the Calumet Township Fire Department and Chief Dennis Raasio of the Quincy-Franklin Township Fire Departments last Oct. 19.

Both departments received \$3,000 worth of wildland fire fighting equipment and training aids, enough to equip 9 firefighters for each department. The equipment included personal protective equipment including Nomex trousers and shirts, fire packs, fire shelters, hard hats, goggles, and gloves; and a variety of hand tools and backpack pumps. The departments also received training material on the use of fire shelters, care of hand tools, and fireline safety.

### **Homestead National Monument, Beatrice Fire and Rescue, and Beatrice Rural Fire Dept.**

Beatrice Rural Fire Department and Beatrice Fire and Rescue in Beatrice, Neb., also received \$7,000 in equipment from the Park Service through the program because of their proximity to Homestead National Monument.

Congressman Doug Bereuter remarked in the *Beatrice Daily Sun*, “This grant highlights the excellent relationship between these two departments and Homestead National Monument of America.”

### **Scotts Bluff National Monument and Gering and Scotts Bluff fire departments**

The Park Service also aided the rural fire departments of Gering and Scotts Bluff near Scotts Bluff National Monument in Nebraska through the program.

“Our goal was to equip 12 firefighters from head to toe with the necessary gear to fight wildland fires,” said Scotts Bluff Monument Superintendant Valerie Naylor, in the *Gering Courier*. “The gear is a lot different from what firefighters would use in a structural fire.”

The *Gering Courier* quotes Gering Fire Chief Jay Templar as saying that in previous years, his crew had to use their regular structural fire gear—heavier and more cumbersome than wildland firefighting gear---to fight wildland fires.

“This equipment will be a big help to us,” Templar told the *Courier*. “It costs about \$1,000 a person for structural fire gear, so there’s no way we could have afforded both [wildland and structural fire gear].”

The next step, Templar said, is to get his firefighting crew certified to qualify them to fight fires on federal land.

“We’re delighted to be a part of this program,” Naylor told the *Courier*. “This equipment will help all of us be more effective in containing wildfires, whenever they happen.”